

NOTES ON PICTURE TALKS.

It seems almost presumptuous to write any notes about a painter so well known as Raphael, but possibly some students may be interested in a few suggestions for planning out the term's work.

In studying the Old Masters we usually devote the first of our picture talks to learning something of the life of our painter, trying to enter into the spirit of the times and to live with him in them. This term we shall from the first be familiar to a certain extent with the times and haunts of Raphael, because we have already learnt to know and love some of his contemporaries.

Raphael's life obviously falls into three divisions:—

1. His student days in Perugia.
2. His work at Florence.
3. The last years at Rome.

We shall try to gain a definite idea of the surroundings and personal circle of the painter during each of these periods, and to see how his art was influenced by them. The children may then be able roughly to date any picture by Raphael, recognising (1) the Perugian period by the resemblance between Raphael's faces and figures and those of his master Perugino, and by the typical Perugian landscape with low hills, blue, winding streams, and straight trees; (2) the period when the influence of the great painters of Florence—Michaelangelo, Lorenzo di Credi, and others—becomes visible and more care is devoted to the study of form and colour; (3) the Roman period when the depth and richness of Raphael's colouring is perhaps only rivalled in Italy by Titian, and when beauty in face and form is unsurpassed. In the pictures set for this term the Roman element preponderates (St. George and the Dragon and Raphael's portrait belong to the Florentine period), but we

shall supplement these by studying reproductions of earlier works and by visits to the National Gallery and the South Kensington Museum.

We find that visits to the London Galleries supply what the children regret in the Perry pictures—the absence of colour. Coloured prints of the Great Masters are apt to be so incorrect and disappointing that when the original is not within reach we prefer to read a description of the colouring and picture it for ourselves.

Last term the study of Corôl led us to consider the purpose of art, and the children unanimously decided that they are not in favour of "art for art's sake." Probably most children are idealists, and therefore Raphael, who painted men and women "not as they are, but as they ought to be," is likely to be a favourite.

The Sistine Madonna, of which the print gives a detail, is sometimes considered Raphael's masterpiece. The Madonna stands amidst the clouds with the Child in her arms. At her feet are two cherubs lost in wondering awe and adoration, whilst all around angel faces peep out eager to greet the new-born Saviour. The Madonna wears a loose robe of crimson, embroidered with gold and covered by a rich blue cloak and a veil of golden brown. On her left kneels St. Barbara, dressed in blue and green, and holding the wheel, the emblem of her martyrdom, whilst on the right is the Pope in a gorgeous cope of cloth of gold and the triple crown beside him. The upward gaze of the little cherubs at the foot of the picture, as well as the attitude of the kneeling saints, directs the eye to Christ as the centre of the composition.

The Burning of the Borgo is a great fresco in the Vatican. It illustrates the story of the Borgo fire which was miraculously stayed by Leo IV. who appeared at a window of the Vatican and made the sign of the cross. In the background is seen the façade of the old basilica of St. Peter. On the left is depicted an incident from the burning of Troy, when

Æneas escapes from a burning house carrying on his back his father Anchises and leading Ascanius by the hand. On the right, the part shown in the Perry picture, are figures bringing water to extinguish the flames.

The Miraculous Draught of Fishes is one of the ten cartoons designed by Raphael for tapestry. The seven existing originals are now in the South Kensington Museum. The painter illustrates the moment when St. Peter, falling at Jesus's feet, exclaims, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." In strong contrast with the agony and distress of the two foremost figures and the strenuous exertion shown by the attitude of the disciples in the second boat, is the serenity of Christ and the calm and peace of the scene, the still green water reflecting like a mirror the boats and their occupants, the deep blue sky, and the deeper green of the little village on the shore of the lake. The blue haze which envelops the whole suggests an early summer dawn.

The Deliverance of St. Peter is again a fresco in the Vatican. The picture consists of three parts. In the centre, St. Peter lies in prison, chained to two guards, who lean against the walls evidently overcome by sleep. The angel appears in a blaze of glory, and touches the saint, who is in the act of waking. In the scene on the right, the angel leads St. Peter out of the prison, down a flight of steps where the guards lie in their armour, sleeping heavily. The apostle walks as if in a trance—"He went out," says the Bible narrative, "as in a dream." On the left is seen the consternation of the guards, who awake to find the prisoned escaped. The darkness is relieved by a torch held by one of the soldiers and by the dim light of the half-moon scudding through the clouds. The general effect of the whole is very dark, and the colours are almost indistinguishable.

THE CHILDREN'S COUNTRY HOLIDAY FUND.

I have again had the pleasure of reading the letters of some of the children who have spent part of their summer holiday in the country. I read 744 letters from children in the sixth standard; they were almost without exception beautifully written and were on the whole very natural in style. There were a few boys who wrote as the Schoolmaster in "The Mother" talked. Not much is told of the journey, as they were children from ten to thirteen years old, and they had probably had a good day's work before they started. Some of the girls took "little ones" with them, and in one letter telling of a day's doing in the country the constant chorus was "then we tidied the little ones." "I kept on thinking what my lady would be like." I did not read a single letter in which any complaints were made of "my lady." The lady's husband was in many cases called "the gentleman at our house." The children's own words will show the kind of people they were fortunate enough to meet:—

"I went to H—— in the care of motherly women and the head ladyship."

"I must now turn your thoughts to the lady's kindness; she let us take it in turns to pour out the tea and be 'Mother.'"

"I had a splendid lady, and her daughters were most ladylike."

"When we got there it was late, but I held the candle while my lady picked us a few raspberries; we then went to bed. When our lady came to bed she gave us some cocoa and a bun, which was lovely."

"I must needs say I am very thankful for having a kind lady."